



Represent

BELIEVERS REPRESENT CHRIST WELL BY HONORING
CIVIL LEADERS AND LOVING THEIR NEIGHBORS.

ROMANS 13:1-14

Live up to your family name. It’s a charge many parents give their sons and daughters early in life, and over time it becomes ingrained in their children. As those children grow into adults, that calling shapes their decisions and guides their relationships. In the same way, believers have been entrusted with the responsibility of honoring the name of Jesus.

 **How have the expectations you grew up with shaped the choices and relationships in your adult life?**

UNDERSTAND THE CONTEXT

ROMANS 13:1-14

In chapter 12 Paul highlighted behavior within the church. In chapter 13 he turned his attention to how believers interact with people outside the church. While we are citizens of heaven, we also live as citizens of earth. Accordingly, we want to represent Christ well in our world so that others will be drawn to Him through our relationships with them.

Paul began this chapter by pointing to the need for believers to submit themselves to the leaders of the Roman government. Christians are to pay taxes to whom they owe taxes, give respect to whom they owe respect, and show honor to whom they owe honor. God instituted government for the good of all people. In His grand scheme, governing authorities are God’s servants to dispense justice in the world (Rom. 13:1-7).

In verses 8-10, Paul addressed the need for believers to nurture healthy relationships with their neighbors. He used the Ten Commandments to illustrate the relationship between love and the law. Sins like adultery, murder, theft, and coveting are caused by selfishness, which is the opposite of sacrificial love. As believers, we owe a debt of love to others. What God expects of us can be summed up in a single principle: “Love your neighbor as yourself” (v. 9).

Every day that passes puts us closer to Jesus’s return. In view of this reality, Paul admonished the believers to “wake up from sleep” as our salvation is “nearer than when we first believed” (v. 11). We should avoid spiritual lethargy, drunkenness, sexual impurity, quarreling, and jealousy. Instead, we are to display Christlikeness outwardly in our daily lives.

 **Read Romans 13:1-14 and pay close attention to each directive Paul gives. Which of these instructions describe practical, everyday ways for believers to live out their faith in Christ?**

EXPLORE **THE TEXT**

HONOR AUTHORITIES (ROM. 13:1-7)

¹ Let everyone submit to the governing authorities, since there is no authority except from God, and the authorities that exist are instituted by God. ² So then, the one who resists the authority is opposing God's command, and those who oppose it will bring judgment on themselves. ³ For rulers are not a terror to good conduct, but to bad. Do you want to be unafraid of the one in authority? Do what is good, and you will have its approval. ⁴ For it is God's servant for your good. But if you do wrong, be afraid, because it does not carry the sword for no reason. For it is God's servant, an avenger that brings wrath on the one who does wrong. ⁵ Therefore, you must submit, not only because of wrath but also because of your conscience. ⁶ And for this reason you pay taxes, since the authorities are God's servants, continually attending to these tasks. ⁷ Pay your obligations to everyone: taxes to those you owe taxes, tolls to those you owe tolls, respect to those you owe respect, and honor to those you owe honor.

VERSES 1-2

Paul addressed believers' responsibilities to *submit* to the *governing authorities*. Such submission reflected their recognition that all authority ultimately resides with God. He, in His sovereign wisdom, *instituted* governmental structures for the order and well-being of society.

Our Christian faith does not give us the freedom to flaunt the legal system.

Consequently, anyone who opposed governmental authority was, in effect, resisting the divine order established by God and would therefore be held accountable by Him. By *opposing* civil authorities, citizens set themselves up to face *judgment*, both from the governing officials empowered to administer punishment and from the Lord, who commanded believers to demonstrate a submissive posture toward civil authority.

Our Christian faith does not give us the freedom to flaunt the legal system. Of course, at some point, we may be forced to choose between the rule of government and the principles of God.

In those cases, we still are subject to the law and must endure the repercussions of our choices. Paul and the Romans certainly understood this truth, having suffered for faith on numerous occasions.

VERSES 3-4

The Lord did not intend for governing authorities to instill fear in citizens through acts of **terror**. Rather, He established government to provide an environment in which individuals could engage in **good conduct** and refrain from **bad** conduct. Within such an environment, citizens would have no reason to fear those in authority; they would need only to devote themselves to what is good to receive the **approval** of those who govern.

Government leaders remain accountable to the Lord, who expects them to guide the populace in accordance with His standards of goodness. When individuals engage in behavior deemed **wrong** in His sight, they have legitimate cause for concern. Authorities possess the power of the **sword**, meaning they are divinely authorized to administer justice and impose appropriate punishment upon wrongdoers. In this respect, government functions as **God's servant, an avenger** through which He brings **wrath** against those who engage in evil.

KEY DOCTRINE: *Religious Liberty*

Civil government being ordained of God, it is the duty of Christians to render loyal obedience thereto in all things not contrary to the revealed will of God. (See 1 Timothy 2:1-2; 1 Peter 2:13-17.)

VERSES 5-7

Because the Lord established human government, discerning believers recognized their responsibility to **submit** to civil authorities. Paul had already identified a significant reason for believers to place themselves under the authority of governing officials: refusal to do so would inevitably result in the government's **wrath**, which would rightly accompany such foolish conduct. Paul then introduced an additional basis for submission. Mature believers should seek to let their **conscience** guide them. Conscience compelled them to pursue what is right and to avoid what is wrong as they served God. Submitting to governing authorities was inherently proper, for government existed by God's own design.

Moreover, wise believers demonstrated their integrity as citizens by putting their conscientious convictions into practice in straightforward, practical ways. One clear expression of this was their willingness to pay taxes. Government leaders performed God's work by exercising authority, and by paying their ***taxes***, Christian citizens supported that divinely sanctioned task.

The directive regarding submission to government focused on the word ***obligations***. If believers want to be good citizens, they will take their obligations seriously. The integrity of their testimony depends on it. For that reason, they are to pay their ***taxes*** and ***tolls*** and show ***respect*** and ***honor*** to government leaders.



How does Paul's teaching that rulers are God's servants for your good challenge or affirm your perspective on government?

HONOR EACH OTHER (ROM. 13:8-10)

⁸ **Do not owe anyone anything, except to love one another, for the one who loves another has fulfilled the law.** ⁹ **The commandments, Do not commit adultery; do not murder; do not steal; do not covet; and any other commandment, are summed up by this commandment: Love your neighbor as yourself.** ¹⁰ **Love does no wrong to a neighbor. Love, therefore, is the fulfillment of the law.**

VERSES 8-10

Beyond taxes owed to government, Paul pointed to a larger debt believers owe—***to love one another***. Unlike financial debts, the debt of love will never be paid in full. We are always under an obligation to love others.



What are some ways you can practically show love to those around you?

Paul illustrated his point with the Ten Commandments. ***Adultery, murder***, stealing, and coveting are rooted in selfishness.

Selfishness is the opposite of self-giving love. God's expectation of believers can be summed up in the command: ***Love your neighbor as yourself.*** This represents ***the fulfillment of the law.***

Unlike financial debts, the debt of love will never be paid in full.

Love for others is a recurring theme throughout the New Testament. In John's Gospel, Jesus taught that His followers would be identified by their love for one another (John 13:34-35). The early church embodied this principle through practical expressions of care (Acts 4:32-35). Later, Paul reminded the Corinthians that genuine love consistently seeks the good of others (1 Cor. 13:4-7). Likewise, both John (1 John 3:18) and Peter (1 Pet. 4:8) urged believers to demonstrate sincere and steadfast love. In the same way, we must learn to love others well.



Paul said that love does no wrong to a neighbor (v. 10). In what ways—through actions, attitudes, words, or silence—might you unintentionally wrong others? How can you become more aware of how your choices impact the people around you?

HONOR CHRIST (ROM. 13:11-14)

¹¹ Besides this, since you know the time, it is already the hour for you to wake up from sleep, because now our salvation is nearer than when we first believed. ¹² The night is nearly over, and the day is near; so let us discard the deeds of darkness and put on the armor of light. ¹³ Let us walk with decency, as in the daytime: not in carousing and drunkenness; not in sexual impurity and promiscuity; not in quarreling and jealousy. ¹⁴ But put on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make no provision for the flesh to gratify its desires.

VERSE 11

Paul offered an additional reason to honor governing authorities and to love one another: believers live in anticipation of Christ's return. Although Paul did not know when Jesus would come again,

he understood that the appointed time was coming. Because of this, he urged the Roman believers to **wake up** spiritually and conduct themselves in a manner consistent with the nearness of that day.

Though two thousand years have passed, each day brings us closer to His return. As Paul reminded his readers, the fulfillment of **our salvation is nearer than when we first believed**.

VERSE 12

Paul used the imagery of **night** and **day** to contrast the moral **darkness** of the world with the **light** of faith. He reminded his readers that a new day would soon dawn. In the midst of prevailing darkness, Paul challenged believers to shine as lights in their communities. The first step in doing so was to **discard the deeds of darkness**. Christ had already redeemed them from that former way of life; there was no reason to return to it. Instead, they were to **put on the armor of light**. Just as armor equips a soldier for battle, God's spiritual armor equips believers to illuminate the darkness as they await the return of Christ (see also Eph. 6:10-18).

The only remedy for the cycle of emptiness is Jesus.

VERSES 13-14

Paul compared the believer's way of living to a **walk**—an appropriate comparison, since life is a journey that steadily moves us toward eternity. He urged believers to walk **with decency**, living in such a way that their conduct could withstand the scrutiny of those around them.

This type of lifestyle stands in stark contrast to the behaviors commonly embraced by the surrounding culture. Paul highlighted examples of how people, lacking a moral compass, attempt to dull their pain through **carousing and drunkenness**, or seek a counterfeit form of intimacy through **sexual impurity and promiscuity**. While Christians are called to be known by their love, the world often tears itself apart through **quarreling and jealousy**.

The only remedy for the cycle of emptiness is Jesus. Those who **put on the Lord Jesus Christ** discover healing, genuine community, and lasting hope. Rather than becoming enslaved to the **desires** of the **flesh**, believers are freed by Christ to become all that God created them to be.

Ultimately, the issue returns to submission. When we submit every aspect of our lives to God, we remain in right fellowship with Him and shine as a light to those around us.



What steps can we take to prevent spiritual lethargy?



How aware are you of Christ's return, and how does that awareness—or lack of it—shape your daily choices?



BIBLE SKILL: *Identify the imagery in a verse or passage and discover what it communicates.*

Compare Romans 13:11-14 with Ephesians 4:22-24 and Colossians 3:10-12. What does this imagery communicate to you about the old life before Christ and the new life in Christ? How does this imagery help you in understanding how God would want you to respond when you battle the flesh, the old person you were before you came to know Christ?

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APPLY THE TEXT

- + Believers should honor civil authorities.
- + Believers are to love our neighbors.
- + Believers are to display Christlikeness so that their lives reflect Jesus.

 **With your Bible study group, discuss why submitting to governing authorities qualifies as a meaningful way to represent Christ. Also share the challenges you face as you try to show His love to the people around you. Pray for one another so that each will represent Him well.**

 **Reflect on your relationships with people around you. What significance do you place on honoring Christ by being a person who strives to live with integrity? Who’s holding you accountable for behaving in ways that others can see Christ in you?**

 **Memorize Romans 13:14.**

Prayer Needs
